

# Early Japan

## Get-Ready to Read!

### What's the Connection?

During the Middle Ages, another civilization developed in East Asia. It arose on the islands of Japan off the coast of the Korean Peninsula.

### Focusing on the Main Ideas

- Japan's mountains and islands isolated Japan and shaped its society. (page 485)
- Japan was settled by people who came from northeast Asia. They were organized into clans and ruled by warriors. (page 486)
- Prince Shotoku created Japan's first constitution and borrowed many ideas from China. (page 488)
- The Japanese religion called Shinto was based on nature spirits. (page 490)

### Locating Places

Japan (juh•PAN)

Hokkaido (hah•KY•doh)

Honshu (HAHN•shoo)

Shikoku (shih•KOH•koo)

Kyushu (kee•OO•shoo)

### Meeting People

Jomon (JOH•mohn)

Yayoi (YAH•yoy)

Jimmu (jeem•mu)

Shotoku (shoh•TOH•koo)

### Building Your Vocabulary

clan (KLAN)

constitution

(KAHN•stuh•TOO•shuhn)

animism (A•nuh•MIH•zuhn)

shrine (SHRYN)

### Reading Strategy

**Organizing Information** Create a diagram to show the basics of the Shinto religion.



## When & Where?



A.D. 300

c. A.D. 300

Yayoi people organize into clans

A.D. 500

c. A.D. 550

Yamato clan rules most of Japan

A.D. 700

A.D. 646

Taika reforms strengthen emperor's powers

# Japan's Geography

**Main Idea** Japan's mountains and islands isolated Japan and shaped its society.

**Reading Focus** Have you ever been in a place with no television, radio, or telephone? How would you feel if you did not know what was going on outside your home? Read to learn how Japan's geography isolated the Japanese and shaped their society.

**Japan** (juh • PAN) is a chain of islands that stretches north to south in the northern Pacific Ocean. Japan's islands number more than 3,000, and many of them are tiny. For centuries, most Japanese have lived on the four largest islands: **Hokkaido** (hah • KY • doh), **Honshu** (HAHN • shoo), **Shikoku** (shih • KOH • koo), and **Kyushu** (kee • OO • shoo).

Like China, much of Japan is covered by mountains. In fact, the islands of Japan are actually the tops of mountains that rise from the floor of the ocean. About 188 of Japan's mountains are volcanoes. Many earthquakes occur in Japan because the islands lie in an area where parts of the earth's surface often shift.

Because of Japan's mountains, only about 20 percent of its land can be farmed. Throughout Japan's history, local armies often fought over the few patches of fertile

farmland. Just as in ancient Greece, the rugged terrain forced many Japanese to turn to the sea for a living. Early on, they settled in villages along the coast and fished for food. Fish and seafood are still important in the Japanese diet.

The sea surrounding Japan's islands made it easy for people in ships to travel along the coast and from island to island. It encouraged people to become merchants, traveling from village to village with goods to trade. The vast ocean around Japan's islands, however, kept the Japanese people isolated, or separate, from the rest of Asia. As a result, Japan developed its own fiercely independent society with its own religion, art, literature, and government.

**Reading Check Describe** How did Japan's geography shape its society?

▼ Mount Fuji is an important national symbol.  
*How did the region's mountains affect early settlement in Japan?*



## Using Geography Skills

Japan's geography isolated the country and helped form a unique culture.

1. List, from north to south, the four major islands that make up Japan.
2. What body of water separates Japan from mainland Asia?

Find NGS online map resources @ [www.nationalgeographic.com/maps](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/maps)



## The First Settlers

**Main Idea** Japan was settled by people who came from northeast Asia. They were organized into clans and ruled by warriors.

**Reading Focus** Do you have many relatives? Do your relatives all come together to do things? Read to learn how the early Japanese people were organized into groups made up of people who were all related to each other.

Japan's earliest people probably came from northeast Asia between 30,000 and 10,000 B.C. At that time, Japan was joined to the Asian continent by land. These early people hunted animals and gathered wild plants. They used fire and stone tools, and they lived in pits dug into the ground.

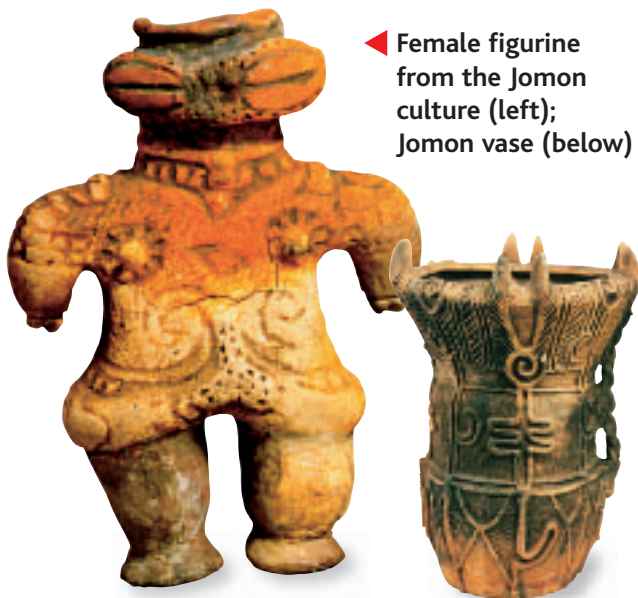
**Who Were the Jomon?** In about 5000 B.C., these wandering groups began to develop a culture. They made clay pottery, using knotted cords to make designs on the clay's surface. Today, this culture is called **Jomon** (JOH•mohn), which means "cord marks" in the Japanese language. Modern archaeologists have found many pieces of Jomon pottery throughout Japan. Over time, the

Jomon people settled in fishing villages along the coast. Fishing became their way of life.

**Why Are the Yayoi Important?** The Jomon culture lasted until about 300 B.C. At that time, a new group of people appeared in Japan. Modern archaeologists have named this culture **Yayoi** (YAH•yoy), after the place in Japan where they first dug up its artifacts.

The Yayoi were the ancestors of the Japanese people. They introduced farming to Japan and practiced a number of skills that they may have learned from the Chinese and Koreans. They made pottery on a potter's wheel and grew rice in paddies. A paddy is a rice field that is flooded when rice is planted and drained for the harvest.

The Yayoi also were skilled in metalworking. They made axes, knives, and hoes from iron, and swords, spears, and bells from bronze. Bells were used in religious rituals—a practice that is still common in Japan today.



◀ Female figurine from the Jomon culture (left); Jomon vase (below)

▶ Bronze bell from the Yayoi people (right); Yayoi pottery (below)



By A.D. 300, the Yayoi, or the early Japanese, had organized themselves into **clans** (KLANZ). A clan is a group of families related by blood or marriage. Yayoi clans were headed by a small group of warriors. Under the warriors were the rest of the people—farmers, artisans, and servants of the warriors. The clan’s warrior chiefs protected the people in return for a share of the rice harvest each year.

The Yayoi buried their chiefs in large mounds known as *kofun*. Made of dirt, these tombs were carefully shaped and surrounded by ditches. They were filled with personal belongings, such as pottery, tools, weapons, and armor. Many of the tombs were as big as Egypt’s pyramids. The largest tomb still stands today. It is longer than five football fields and at least eight stories high.

**Who Are the Yamato?** Like many other people whose society began in ancient times, the Japanese have myths, or stories that tell how things began. The most important myth explained the creation of Japan. It says that centuries ago, two gods dipped a spear into the sea. When they pulled it out, drops of salty water fell on the water’s surface and formed the islands of Japan. The two gods then created the sun goddess, Amaterasu, to rule over Earth. They also created the storm god, Susanowo, as her companion.

Susanowo was sent to Earth. There, his children became the first people of Japan. Amaterasu, however, sent her grandson Ninigi to rule over them. To make sure that everyone would accept his power, she gave Ninigi her mirror, her jewel, and a great sword. These objects became the sacred symbols of leadership in early Japan.

Historians today are not sure of the actual events on which this myth is based. However, they do know that during the



▲ The sun goddess, Amaterasu, emerges from her cave, bringing light into the world. **Which group claimed that they came from Amaterasu?**

A.D. 500s, a clan called the Yamato became strong enough to bring most of Japan under its rule. The other clans still held their lands, but they had to give their loyalty to the Yamato chief.

Yamato chiefs claimed that they came from the sun goddess and, therefore, had a right to rule Japan. Japanese legend states that a Yamato leader named **Jimmu** (jeem•mu) took the title “emperor of heaven.” He founded a line of rulers in Japan that has never been broken. Akihito (ah•kee•HEE•toh), who is Japan’s emperor today, is one of his descendants.

**Reading Check Identify** What do historians know for sure about the rise of the Yamato?



# Prince Shotoku's Reforms

**Main Idea** Prince Shotoku created Japan's first constitution and borrowed many ideas from China.

**Reading Focus** When you try something new, are you tempted to use what someone else has done as a model? Read to find out how Shotoku used China as a model for his reforms in Japan.

About A.D. 600, a Yamato prince named **Shotoku** (shoh•TOH•koo) took charge of Japan on behalf of his aunt, the empress Suiko (swee•koh). He wanted to create a strong government, and he looked to China

as an example of what to do. You remember that in China, a powerful emperor ruled with the help of trained officials chosen for their abilities.

To reach this goal for Japan, Shotoku created a **constitution** (KAHN•stuh•TOO•shuhn), or a plan of government. Shotoku's constitution gave all power to the emperor, who had to be obeyed by the Japanese people. He also created a bureaucracy and gave the emperor the power to appoint all the officials. The constitution listed rules for working in the government. The rules were taken from the ideas of Confucius.

Shotoku also wanted Japan to learn from China's brilliant civilization. He sent officials and students to China to study. The Japanese not only learned about Buddhist teachings but also absorbed a great deal about Chinese art, medicine, and philosophy.

Shotoku ordered Buddhist temples and monasteries to be built throughout Japan. One of them, called Horyuji (HOHR•yoo•JEE), still stands. It is Japan's oldest temple and the world's oldest surviving wooden building.

After Shotoku, other officials continued to make Japan's government look like China's. In A.D. 646 the Yamato began the Taika, or Great Change. They divided Japan into provinces, or regional districts, all run by officials who reported to the emperor. In addition, all land in Japan came under the emperor's control.

Clan leaders could direct the farmers working the land, but they could not collect taxes anymore. Instead, government officials were to gather part of the farmers' harvest in taxes for the emperor. Together with Shotoku's reforms, this plan created Japan's first strong central government.

**Reading Check Identify** What happened during the Great Change?

## Primary Source

### Japan's New Constitution

This is part of the constitution created by Shotoku.

"Harmony is to be cherished, and opposition for opposition's sake must be avoided as a matter of principle. . . .

When an imperial command is given, obey it with reverence. The sovereign is likened to heaven, and his subjects are likened to earth. With heaven providing the cover and earth supporting it, the four seasons proceed in orderly fashion, giving sustenance to all that which is in nature. If earth attempts to overtake the functions of heaven, it destroys everything.

Cast away your ravenous desire for food and abandon your covetousness [envy] for material possessions. If a suit is brought before you, render a clear-cut judgement. . . .

Punish that which is evil and encourage that which is good."

—Prince Shotoku,  
"The Seventeen Article Constitution"



### Document-Based Question

To what are the emperor and his subjects compared?



## PRINCE SHOTOKU

A.D. 573–621

Prince Shotoku was born into the powerful Soga family, as the second son of Emperor Yomei. Shotoku's real name is Umayado, which means "the prince of the stable door." According to legend, Shotoku's mother gave birth to him while she was inspecting the emperor's stables. During Shotoku's childhood, Japan was a society of clans, or large extended families. There was fighting between Shotoku's own Soga family and their rival, the Mononobe family. The Soga and Mononobe clans were Japan's two most powerful families, and each wanted to rule Japan.

Shotoku was a very bright, articulate child. He learned about Buddhism from one of his great uncles. He then studied with two Buddhist priests and became devoted to Buddhism.

At the age of 20, Shotoku became Japan's crown prince. The early teachings of Buddhism strongly influenced his leadership. He introduced political and religious reforms that helped build a strong central government in Japan modeled after China. At the request of his aunt, the empress, Shotoku often spoke about Buddhism and the process of enlightenment.

He also wrote the first book of Japanese history.

When Prince Shotoku died, the elderly people of the empire mourned as if they had lost a dear child of their own. A written account describes their words of grief: "The sun and moon have lost their brightness; heaven and earth have crumbled to ruin: henceforward, in whom shall we put our trust?"



▲ Statue believed to be of Prince Shotoku



▲ The Horyu-ji temple, built by Prince Shotoku

### Then and Now

Think of a recent leader or other public figure whose death caused people to mourn as if they knew that person well. Who is it? Why do you think people identified with that person? Why did the Japanese identify so closely with Shotoku?



# What Is Shinto?

**Main Idea** The Japanese religion, called Shinto, was based on nature spirits.

**Reading Focus** Today we know the importance of protecting the environment. Why is nature important to us? Read to learn why the early Japanese thought nature was important.

Like many ancient peoples, the early Japanese believed that all natural things are alive, even the winds, the mountains, and the rivers. They believed that all of these things have their own spirits. This idea is called **animism** (A • nuh • mi • zuhm). When people needed help, they asked the nature spirits, whom they called *kami*, to help them.

To honor the *kami*, the Japanese worshipped at **shrines** (SHRYNZ), or holy places. There, priests, musicians, and dancers performed rituals for people who asked the



◀ Shinto priests

gods for a good harvest, a wife or a child, or some other favor.

These early Japanese beliefs developed into the religion of Shinto. The word *Shinto* means “way of the spirits,” and many Japanese still follow Shinto today. Followers believe the *kami* will help only if a person is pure. Many things, such as illness, cause spiritual stains that must be cleansed by bathing and other rituals before praying.

**Reading Check Explain** How did the Japanese honor the *kami*?

## Section 1 Review

**History online**

**Homework Helper** Need help with the material in this section? Visit [jat.glencoe.com](http://jat.glencoe.com)

### Reading Summary

#### Review the Main Ideas

- Japan’s mountainous islands contain little land for farming, leading many people to turn to the sea for a living.
- Japan was settled by people from northeast Asia, organized into clans and ruled by warriors.
- While ruling Japan, Prince Shotoku made the emperor a strong ruler and set up a government similar to China’s.
- Japan’s first religion, Shinto, was based on the idea of nature spirits called *kami*.

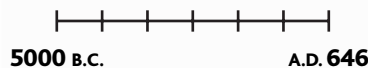
### What Did You Learn?

1. What skills did the Yayoi practice that they may have learned from the Chinese and Koreans?
2. In the Shinto religion, what do people worship? How are they worshiped?

#### Critical Thinking

##### 3. Sequencing Information

Draw a time line like the one below. Fill in dates and information related to events in Japanese history from the Jomon to Shotoku.



4. **Summarize** Describe Japanese society under the Yayoi around A.D. 300.
5. **Analyze** In what ways did Shotoku look to China to improve Japan?
6. **Expository Writing** Imagine you are visiting Japan sometime in the A.D. 300s. Write a letter to a friend describing what you have observed and learned about the Shinto religion.
7. **Reading Cause and Effect** Create a cause-and-effect graphic organizer that shows how geography affected the early development of Japan.